

# A Chaste Mind and Heart: A Medieval Answer to a Centuries-old Problem

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As I grew up in the 60s and 70s in a very conservative, fundamentalist family, my parents instilled in me a great dread of communism and revolution: we had no icon corner, but we had no lack of admiration for the anti-communists of that era, from Senator McCarthy to Senator Helms. We were even members of the John Birch Society.

Thus, I was opposed to the revolution from my youngest days. Ironically, however, I now proudly think of myself as a revolutionary when I introduce my students to Dante, for I now join the Florentine poet's stand against the tide of a powerful tradition that has been steadily rolling

upon our shores for over 800 years, a movement that Dante saw while still at its formative beginning, when but little more than a slowly rising, eddy tide, inchoate and hardly sure which way the moon was dragging it.

In the fifth Canto of *The Inferno*, Dante comes to the second circle of Hell, reserved for those who have given in to lust, and let “their desire govern their reason.” There Divine justice punished those who in life had let their disordered erotic passions govern them by having them buffeted about by winds in a punishment analogous to the buffeting the damned had inflicted on their own souls in life, an equilibrium of vice with punishment that Dante termed *contrapasso*. In this circle, those who had pursued a life of unrepentant sexual desire were driven by their passions; but here they realized as well that the momentary respite they may have enjoyed through sexual congress on earth showed itself as it truly was, a disordered love pursued for the sake of oneself, and not for the sake of the beloved, which can never lead to any respite of the real problem (disordered desires), let alone a true satisfaction (because love is abandonment of the desire for one’s own benefit, the ‘satisfaction’ is contained in the action itself). As he makes his way down the circle, Dante

encounters the murdered lovers Paolo and Francesca, and engages them in a conversation, as they are given by God a reprieve from their torments in order to talk with the pilgrim:

“Francesca,” I began, “your torments move

my heart to weep in pity for your pain.

But tell me, in the seasons of sweet sighs,

how did it happen, what made Love give way

that you should know the truth of your desires?”

And she to me: “ . . .

One day we two were reading for delight

about how love had mastered Lancelot;

we were alone and innocent and felt

no cause to fear. And as we read, at times

we went pale, as we caught each other’s glance,

but we were conquered by one point alone.

For when we read that the much-longed-for smile

accepted such a gentle lover’s kiss,

this man, whom nothing will divide from me,

Trembled to place his lips upon my mouth.

A pander was that author, and his book!

That day we did not read another page.”

And all the while one spirit told their tale,

the other wept so sadly that I fell

for pity of it to a deathlike faint—

And I dropped like a body stricken dead.<sup>1</sup>

Why Dante the author has Dante the pilgrim faint brings a subtle peripety in the *Divine Comedy*, for the pilgrim has had an epiphany about his own soul, one that our society needs to have as regards its own soul.

Yet before we unpack Dante, we must leave our pilgrim back there on that Good (Great and Holy) Friday in the year of our Lord 1300, and attend first to the soul of our present culture. To begin, we need to answer the question of where our culture finds itself in the year of our Lord 2020, especially as regards the status of Christianity on campus. Probably nowhere else in our country is Christianity as enfeebled as it is on college and university campuses. Today, young people would be better off as

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<sup>1</sup> Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Anthony Esolen (New York: Random House, 2002), 51-53. The *contrapasso* here is that Paolo and Francesca can never be rid of each other, and their desires are never sated.

Christians on the streets of our most secular cities, wherever we might think they are, than in the academy.

There is no need to rehearse the dreadful world that the American Academy has become; in most ways, it is not an academy any longer. Of course, there are some places that are, in varying degrees, bastions against the current insanity; but even some of these schools and their policies leave something to be desired, especially when viewed from an Orthodox vantage.

This is especially true regarding the question of sexual purity, though as will be argued, we should be a bit ambivalent about that term. Statistics abound regarding the state of chastity and sexual purity on campus, and they are grim, and have been grim for the past six decades at least—that is, ever since the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Studies spanning decades going from 1970 till at least 2010 have shown that sexual activity on campus remains pretty much undiminished, as 50% of students consider themselves sexually active, and another 25% admit to engaging in sexual acts.

Thus what we have at best is but 25% of college-age students who have preserved their sexual purity. I say at best, because some may be doing this simply from ambivalence, lack of interest, or simply not having found that “special someone,” or from simple lack of opportunity. And it should be added, however, that among the 75% are students who have fallen, many have nonetheless turned to a life of chastity. I certainly know this is the case among some of the students I have taught, for they have confessed this to me.

Yet we should not look at these relatively static numbers as showing no change for good or ill in the sexual mores of today’s university students; for a profound change has occurred, as evidenced in the work of Lisa Wade of Occidental College, in her 2018 book, *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*.<sup>2</sup> She has also written much about this topic online.<sup>3</sup>

Wade points out that for many of the students, sex now needs to be as antiseptic and sterile as possible, done without interest in the partner,

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<sup>2</sup> Wade, *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus* (New York: Norton, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Cf., <https://scholars.org/brief/rise-hookup-sexual-culture-american-college-campuses>. Accessed 23 February 2020.

and certainly done without any sort of emotional bond. This is “hookup” culture. Sex without consequences simply means that not even is romance part of this liaison culture, a world of trysts enacted with utter emotional detachment. Wade points out that up to 25% of students routinely hook up, though not quite as routinely as some of them would like, or as many people might think. The campus is slowly becoming an incredibly isolated, alienated, and cold place. Hookup culture is not one of intimacy in any form, but one of isolation.

Wade casts no real moral opprobrium on this reality, though she does say it can lead to sexual violence, and that it should not be a race to see which partner “cares less.” She also finds it a problem that people can have sex thinking they can disentangle themselves from their emotions, and that this is psychologically unhealthy. But ultimately, Wade, as a feminist (and it should be noted, a post-modern), wants sex without consequences; she thinks it’s good for women to be free in sexual license and, like men, find in it some pleasurable experience.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wade lists all the achievements of feminism, which would seem to include that women can be as wanton as she thinks men have typically been. Wade, *American Hookup*, 63.

But for all her blind spots, Wade hits on something very crucial, namely that hookup culture did not start on the campus: it started in gay bath houses. Thus what is going on in campus hookup culture is just a continuation of the anonymous, sterile world of gay culture transferred to the radicals of the 1960s, and from there to the rest of the university system.<sup>5</sup>

What Wade misses in all of this, and what many have missed, is that this cold and sterile world is an inevitable outcome of not a decades-long decadence (though doubtless an acceleration), but a centuries-long process dating back at least to the beginning of the twelfth century. What's happening now is the inevitable outcome—what any Orthodox Christian would hope is the long overdue collapse—of the cult of courtly and romantic love, a world bequeathed to us by the minstrels and poets of Occitan, that is, by the Troubadours, the cultural world of southern France in the Middle Ages, known as Languedoc.

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<sup>5</sup> Wade herself really sees the story as starting in the 1920s, when young people first went out unchaperoned, and this claim appears in several places. Wade, *American Hookup*, p. 113, says that the 1920s produced the grandparents of today's hookup culture, and the 1970s gay culture were the two dads.

The full measure of what the Troubadours accomplished, the magnitude of the shift that occurred, has only been fully taken within this past century by three notable scholars, two English and the other Swiss, who called attention to the Troubadours' vast reimagining of what love entailed. In 1936, C. S. Lewis wrote his first and probably most well-known academic work, *The Allegory of Love*.<sup>6</sup> Lewis argued that the changes brought about by the Troubadours, the Goliards, and the authors of Arthurian Romance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries dwarfed those changes we associate with the Renaissance of the fifteenth century, and pretty much any upheaval since. In fact, it set the stage for a decadence that has brought about the very world we inhabit, wherein love is not disinterested benevolence toward the object of love, but the attainment of a prize; and where love is far more about the sentiment and emotions of the lover than about the well-being of the beloved.

Lewis writes:

The characteristics of this sentiment, and its systematic coherence throughout the love poetry of the Troubadours as a whole,

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<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936).

are so striking that they easily lead to a fatal misunderstanding. We are tempted to treat ‘courtly love’ as a mere episode in literary history

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If the thing at first escapes our notice, this is because we are so familiar with the erotic tradition of modern Europe that we mistake it for something natural and universal and therefore do not inquire into its origins. It seems to us natural that love should be the commonest theme of serious imaginative literature: but a glance at classical antiquity or at the Dark Ages at once shows us that what we took for ‘nature’ is really a special state of affairs, which will probably have an end, and which certainly had a beginning in eleventh-century Provence. It seems . . . a natural thing that love (under certain conditions) should be regarded as a noble and ennobling passion: it is only if we imagine ourselves trying to explain this doctrine to Aristotle, Virgil, St. Paul, or the author of *Beowulf* that we become aware how far from natural it is.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, 4. An excellent book on St. Paul in his world, in many ways a justification of his Christian vision and defense of Christian charity from the attacks of his modern despisers, is the classicist Sarah Ruden’s *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).

Denis de Rougemont, the second author, though far less well-known than Lewis, forms just as crucial a piece in our understanding of how revolutionary the Troubadours were. He published his *L'Amor et l'Occident* in 1939, just three years after Lewis's *Allegory of Love*,<sup>8</sup> De Rougemont expanded the book for its second English edition as *Love in the West*.<sup>9</sup>

De Rougemont was a philosopher and cultural gadfly who saw the perversion of love in the twelfth century as arising out of not merely the disordered passions of the minstrels of southern France, but from a doctrinal heresy in Christianity that had fundamentally reinterpreted human nature. This same observation had been made by H. J. Chaytor earlier in the century:

Thus the so-called Albigeois heresy was of long and steady growth, contemporary with a large portion of the literary history of the country: we shall naturally look for some expression of this heresy in Provencal literature: we shall, at any rate, expect to find some trace in the literature of those racial characteristics which

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<sup>8</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1939).

<sup>9</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the West*, 2<sup>nd</sup> English edition, revised (New York: Pantheon, 1956).

predisposed some of the peoples in the South of France to accept the heresy which proved their ultimate ruin.<sup>10</sup>

De Rougemont traced this change from the ancient forms of *caritas* or *agape* to what is now our modern notion of love and romance to twelfth-century Provence and Languedoc, and in particular to those villages, houses, manors, and estates that harbored Catharism, the heresy also known as Albigensianism. The Cathars were theological dualists, holding to absolute powers of light and darkness, good and evil; they were probably direct heirs of the Bogomils of the Balkans.

A vast literature exists on the Cathars and the medieval Manichees, though it seems to have reached its highwater mark at the turn of the century.<sup>11</sup> To the Cathars, the soul had been trapped in the body and suffered from the passions and the degradations of the flesh, awaiting a release that would only come at death. Marriage was but the *iurata fornicatio* (justified fornication), and to the Troubadours, a place where love could

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0           <sup>10</sup> Chaytor, *Troubadours of Dante, Being Selections from the Works of the Provencal Poets quoted by Dante* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), p. xvi.

1           <sup>11</sup> See especially Sir Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949); Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in the Languedoc in the High Middle Ages* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1992); and Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

not exist. Earthly loves were at best frustrations, distractions, and obstacles, so that chastity is extolled by both groups, but seemingly always at arms' length.<sup>12</sup>

For de Rougemont, the Troubadour embraced an ideal of love that had to do with the beloved only accidentally. The knight of Troubadour song was the thrall of his lady, *midons*, bent to her will as she sends him on quests to prove his devotion; and thus love became the quest for proving worthiness. Consequently, both lover and beloved acted toward the other as means, and not as ends in themselves. The emphasis on self, almost to the neglect of the ‘beloved’ because she was always and ever unattainable, means that there can be no resolution of earthly love, except in death; it is a narcissism ending in nihilism. In the Troubadours, de Rougemont asserted, love is the overcoming of obstacles, obstacles placed in the path of the lover (Lewis notes this as well, that love is obedience to the lady’s merest whim).<sup>13</sup> Without these obstacles there can be no ennobling passion; and to

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2       <sup>12</sup> De Rougemont, *Love*, 85-87.

3       <sup>13</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*,

be direct, these obstacles can never exist in marriage. Thus marriage is not the realm of love.

Here we can look at the twelfth-century writer, Andreas Cappellanas, who sees jealousy as the great obstacle to the lover, and that which makes love what it is. Since jealousy cannot ever be in marriage, this means love does not exist in marriage, only in adultery, since love is never an abandonment of self for the other, but at best the making of the beloved the object of one's heroism and quest: "Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace." And, "For what is love but an inordinate desire to receive passionately a furtive and hidden embrace?"<sup>14</sup>

Thus love is a frustration, whose only end is a release from the frustration into death, what de Rougemont labels as the passion-myth, one that glorifies an erotic sterility, and in the end is only a love for death. De Rougemont notes in his closing pages: "All pagan religions deify Desire. All

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<sup>4</sup> <sup>14</sup> Andreas Cappellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, John J. Parry, trans., with introduction and notes (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), pp. 28, 100.

seek to be upheld and saved by Desire, which is thus instantly transformed into the greatest enemy of life, the seduction of Nothingness.”<sup>15</sup>

Though not agreeing with de Rougemont that the Troubadours found inspiration from the Cathars, Sir Roger Scruton emphasizes this same conclusion, that erotic love can only resolve into nothingness or death, in his excellent commentary on Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, entitled *Death-Devoted Heart*.<sup>16</sup> For Scruton, Wagner, who certainly knew the philosophical questions of his day, was deeply indebted to Kant’s moral imperative (“Thou shalt treat people as ends and not means”) in thinking about love. In Wagner, love is the loss of self to the beloved, the ultimate abandonment of self between two dying things. Scruton would later describe this same dynamic in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.<sup>17</sup>

At first glance, this would seem to speak against the Troubadour idea that love is but the “inordinate desire” of the beloved’s embrace. Yet as Sir Roger points out, the telling point was not the “objectification,” but rather

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5       <sup>15</sup> De Rougemont, *Love*, 312.

6       <sup>16</sup> Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and Sacred in Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford: OUP, 2004). There’s an excellent YouTube interview with Sir Roger and Sarah-Jane Leslie on Wagner that I highly recommend on this topic.

7       <sup>17</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung* (New York: Overlook Press, 2017).

that having the beloved for the beloved's sake could not be real, and could only resolve in death. Love finds its resolution, its denouement, not in joy, but an oblivion that ends the tragedy of a love so defined. Nihilism can be its only proper *telos*, forever cold, forever sterile.

Ultimately, in the Troubadours, love is only accidentally about the beloved; rather, it is seated in the lover, and that is why there can be no real resolution. This from William IX of Aquitaine's *Farai un vers de dreyt nien*:

I have a lady, who or where

I cannot tell you, but I swear

She treats me neither ill nor fair

But I'm not blue —

Just as long as the Normans stay up there

Out of Poitou.

I have not seen, yet I adore

This distant love; she sets no store

By what I think, and furthermore

('Tis sad but true)

Others there are, some three or four,

I'm faithful to.<sup>18</sup>

For Duke William, keeping faith with the objects of his amorous inclinations does not even rise to the level of feudal faith—the women are idealized, that is, they are inventions of his imagination, not just as literary inventions, but as idealized conquests that never rise to the level of Christian love.

This brings us back to Dante and his case of the vapors, the basis for the rest of my students' journey with Dante through Hell, into Purgatory, and then at last into Heaven. I normally schedule three weeks to cover Dante in my Great Books course, but the last time I taught it, it took four weeks just to get through Purgatory. The discussions that the *Commedia* elicited tell why reading Dante proves so revolutionary—namely, that Dante was the first author to stand athwart the *literati* and writers of his time and yell “halt!” to a fundamental redefinition of love that has persisted to our own day.

Yet for all of Dante's efforts, and while others did the same, both among the clerics such as the Rector of the University of Paris Jean

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8           <sup>18</sup> William, Count of Poitou, “A Song of Nothing,” T. G. Bergin, trans., in C. W. Jones, ed., *Medieval Literature in Translation* (New York: Longmans, 1950), 668–669.

Gerson, and among the laity, such as Dante's first French translator, the poet and author Christine di Pizan, in the main their efforts failed to hold back a wave that washed away all before it.<sup>19</sup> The mentalities and sentiments of the Troubadours radically remade the image of love in Western Europe, and to some extent even in Eastern Europe; and thus we have inherited from the Troubadours many of our own ideas about love.

As for our swooning Dante: our pilgrim faints at the story of Paolo and Francesca certainly out of sympathy for their plight, not so much because he grieves for them, but because he realizes that he is them. Something reiterated throughout his journey is that he needs to reorient his very soul, change who and what he is in his intellect and desires, or else his fate shall be among those in Hell. Indeed, for Dante the pilgrim, this second circle of Hell shall be his fate should he not find his way to love Beatrice rightly. Dante's ideas about love were those of Paolo and Francesca, drawn from the same Troubadours who had lead them to hell; and Dante indeed in his earlier poetry demonstrated his debt to them. What is more, he had himself fallen into sexual sin, and it is his disordered

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<sup>9</sup> <sup>19</sup> See Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984), and especially chapter 4, "The Quarrel of the Rose," 73-89.

passions, the love of people and things as means to his own ends, and not as ends worth loving in themselves, that he needed to overcome.

Beatrice indirectly chides Dante, when they at last meet at the top of Mount Purgatory, that once she had died, and she was no longer physically present, Dante should then have loved her *more truly*; but because he had not loved her properly to begin with, his passions just turned to other objects which were but simulacra of truth. As she relates to the angels upon meeting him:

For a time I sustained him with my sight:  
showing to him my youthful eyes, I led him  
and turned him with me toward the true and right.

But once I stood upon the threshold of  
my second age, exchanging life for life,  
he took himself from me and gave his love  
To someone else. From flesh to spirit I rose  
and found less favor in his eyes, although  
I'd grown more beautiful and virtuous.

He turned his steps along a way not true,

pursuing the false images of good,  
which promise all and never follow through.<sup>20</sup>

Dante's disordered and fallen desires, his lust, ultimately, as with the Troubadours, could only be realized in a release from earthly life, i.e., a narcissism that only resolved itself in nihilism.

To read *The Divine Comedy* is to read Dante's journey, emotionally, intellectually, devotionally, away from his old former Troubadour self, who saw the objects of his desire as but means to his own ends, and to the new man, illuminated by love, who understood that his loves were not for his benefit, and who saw the source of all love as that which shapes reality. In short, love itself is an ascetical practice, one tied to the very theological foundations of reality in the Incarnation. The moral and theological are inextricably bound together.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>0</sup> <sup>20</sup> Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto XXX.121-132, in Esolen, *Purgatory* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 333.

<sup>1</sup> <sup>21</sup> A wonderful explication of this reality is given by Oliver O'Donovan, in "How can Theology be Moral?" *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Fall, 1989), 81-94. O'Donovan points out the tensions that stand between morality and theology, most notably that theology is declarative, using reason but based on revelation, while ethics are deliberative; and that theology is Christocentric (i.e., highly specialized), while moral thought is generic (what any and all ought to do, always). O'Donovan, on this second point, makes a critical point that in Christ are all men, and thus the specific is itself a universal; and the life of Christ, a theological datum, is itself universally binding, a concrete universal, as it were (see 88ff.).

On a more accessible level, see Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick's "Moral Revisionism is Irrational and Anti-Christian," at <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/asd/2019/12/17/moral-revisionism-is-irrational-and-anti-christian/?fbclid=IwAR2-k2si-duibSTX7QdpaQ9o8n->

My students grapple with this no end, having never really been taught that the life of the imagination must also be an ascetical life. I have had students ask me point blank, in class, about how to keep from thinking lustful thoughts; and for most of them they just take for granted (no doubt bolstered by so much popular tripe) that they have no way not to. A few will ask, almost all of them rather defensively, whether living a life of abstinence or purity is actually healthy and natural.

Among the resources I have used in answering these questions have been St. Benedict and his Rule (the first thing that the students in my Great Books course read). Drawing on the disciplined structure of St. Benedict's monastery, from the structure of the Benedictine day to the centrality of psalmody within it, I point out that the monks would have in relative short order memorized the entire Psalter.<sup>22</sup> The students, of course, are incredulous. Who could memorize the entire book of Psalms? I then ask: how many songs do you have on your phone/ipod? "Oh, hundreds" (for some, over a thousand).

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LpGrYiBkrYQqdZKCnIj-qZOMz\_5h46ik, accessed 23 February 2020.

<sup>22</sup> In a conversation with Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon, I was impressed with his ability to *rattle off* the Psalms in Latin, and later asked if he had memorized them while at Gethsemani Abbey. He said he had known many already before he entered there in 1956 (at the age of 17, I believe).

“And how many have you memorized?”

“Why, almost all of them.”

“And how many Psalms are there?”

Crickets.

The silence mostly comes not because they are ignorant that there are but 150 (or even 151) Psalms, but because of the revelation of where their priorities have been. For some, it also dawns on them that part of their problems with scattered thoughts and the inability to hold back lust comes from the want of discipline that their musical habits have brought. And this, beyond the reality that a large measure of the songs they listen to feed their libidos through lyrics and the less than modest images that often occur with the videos of these songs.

To drive the point home, I also ask my students when they wake up in the morning, what comes into their minds, that song that sticks in your head all day? Is it what you had been listening to the night before, or what song is playing on the alarm? Or is it “if I remembered Thee upon my bed, at the dawn I meditated upon Thee; for Thou art become my helper, in the

shelter of Thy wings will I rejoice. My soul hath cleaved after Thee, Thy right hath been quick to uphold me” (Ps. 62/63:7-9)?

In my Orthodoxy course, I have the students read *The Way of the Pilgrim*. Most of the students in the course (the last time I taught it, 14 of the 18) were not Orthodox, and they find this story of an impoverished and crippled man who spends his life guarding vegetables or wandering the countryside, and saying the Jesus Prayer thousands of times a day, a strange tale. By the time we get to *The Way of the Pilgrim*, most of them know better than to voice the objection about “vain repetitions,” but they still grapple with “what’s going on here?” I point out that the pilgrim is reorienting his whole conceptual world, the default position of his soul, from one which is scattered and constantly in agitation, to one which is focused upon the salvific name of Christ. In a sense, he is replacing his old operating system with a far better one, one that actually gives him access to that one, most important thing. Contemplation of the Name becomes what he is, as his now disciplined thoughts determine his life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <sup>23</sup> Elder Thaddeus, *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: The Life and Teachings of Elder Thaddeus of Vitornica*. trans. Ana Smiljanic (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2012).

The demise of sexual purity on the modern college campus, the denouement of events and processes whereby the goal of love has become more about the lover than the beloved, where sex is divorced from the ascesis and sacramental commitment of marriage, and where young people have left home without the benefit of having had their minds disciplined from their youth up in thinking about whatsoever things are lovely, true, and beautiful, is also a failure, at every level, of the academy that once put a priority on the cultivation of the life of the mind as a necessary goal of education. Indeed, a large part of the modern academy's existence is bent on students *not* thinking this way, *not* cultivating their minds, and where you have professors complain that any talk of the life of the mind is elitist.

I have asked my students, repeatedly over the years, about the relative temperature of student life as regards matters of sexual purity. Some years back one of my colleagues in the Psychology Department at my former employer, an evangelical college, did a campus-wide survey and found that while the vast majority of students were chaste, a sizable minority were not. I recently asked some students not about “who’s having sex, and how often,” but whether their Christian college promoted a life of chastity and

purity. Most of them stated that their school certainly had expectations, and these are generally followed; but as for actively promoting such a life, they could not say that this was the case. Yet this is begging a question: is it enough just to live an abstemious life?

Thus my ambivalence about the term “sexual purity.” While it is certainly better to live chastely than not, to maintain a life of sexual purity means far more than just abstinence, but first to have a mind disciplined to avoid even lustful thoughts. Cultivating lust shapes our lives, our passions, our intentions, and turns the objects of these disordered desires into just that: objects that exist not as ends in themselves, but as means for our own purposes and ends. This is pornography. If we want real sexual purity on campus, we have to start with a life of the mind that moves beyond the persistent habit of entertaining and playing with vile thoughts, to one that knows how to reject such thoughts, and instead turn the mind’s gaze toward God.<sup>24</sup>

Having icons always with us, remembering always our pectoral cross, and disciplining the mind and its life of thought by saying the Jesus Prayer,

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<sup>4</sup> <sup>24</sup> This is the real theme of Hieromonk Damascene (Christensen) in his *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina: Valaam Books, 2012).

all are part of this. Filling the mind with good literature, as well as the Psalms, and even beautiful music, are part of this discipline. “Beauty will save the world” is not just some catchy Dostoevskean nostrum trumpeted by Prince Myskin in one of his more memorably unstable moments, but the admission that the contemplation of the beautiful leads to a beautiful mind, the contemplation of truth leads to a discerning mind, the contemplation of the Good leads to a sound mind; and each of these necessarily leads to the contemplation of God, which leads to a divinized mind. All of this is part of the ascesis of our intellectual life.

If we hope for purity on campus, then ultimately we need the type of campuses that nurture and promote this type of intellectual asceticism and discipline, where love is abandonment of my own desires to the benefit of the other, and where the persistent pursuit of God for God alone occupies the entirety of the campus’s mind.